Police Think Bishop Signed Credit Slip

By Donald P. Baker 3/17/76
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Montgomery County police apparently are convinced that it was Bradford Bishop Jr. who used his credit card for a purchase in North Carolina on March 2, the day after his wife, mother and three sons were beaten to death in their Bethesda home.

"We have completed an analysis of the handwriting" on the Bank Americard receipt "and Bishop is still our suspect," a police spokesman said last night.

North Carolina Attorney General Rufus Edmisten said the signature is "the most important piece of evidence yet that Bishop was alive" after the slayings.

Bishop, 39, a State Department foreign service officer, has been missing since the killings were discovered. A warrant secured by Montgomery County police last Friday charges Bishop with the slayings.

It was also learned that Bishop's diplomatic passport has not been recovered by police, but that the title to the family's 1974 Chevrolet station wagon was found during a search of the Bishop home at 8103 Lilly Stone Dr. in the Carderock Springs section of Bethesda.

The station wagon, a rust-colored Malibu bearing Maryland tags DGL-896, and the family's golden retreiver, Leo, are missing along with Bishop.

The bodies of Bishop's wife, Annette, 35; mother, Lobelia, 68, and sons Bradford III, 14; Brent, 10, and Geoffrey, 5, were found on fire in a makeshift grave in Tyrrell County, N.C., about 100 miles north of Jacksonville, about 12:40 p.m. on March 2.

The credit card transaction occurred between 5 p.m. and 7 p.m. the same day, in the outside Sports store. Owner John Wheatly said the person who used Bishop's Bank Americard bought sporting goods that cost $15.50.

Wheatly said no one in the store could remember

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who made the purchase, but after he was shown Bishop's picture, Wheatly said the face "looked awfully familiar."

Wheatly completed an inventory of his stock last night in an unsuccessful effort to determine what Bishop purchased. "All I can say is that it was more than one item," Wheatly said.

Wheatly said the receipt listed the purchase only as "sporting goods, which probably means he bought a shirt (football jersey) or athletic socks.

"It wasn't shoes (as had once been thought by a clerk) or a gun or ammunition," said Wheatly, who said those transactions would have been recorded differently.

Edmisten said he plans to send additional agents of the North Carolina Bureau of Investigation to Eastern Carolina today "now that we have solid information that Bishop was alive there after the killings."

Police said discovery of the car title means that Bishop would have difficulty selling the vehicle to a reputable dealer. "But he could have run it into a swamp or river, shipped it out or sold it to someone who didn't care about a title," a police official said.